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## Rochester at the Turn of the Century

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

Like a golden anniversary, the year 1950 prompts historical reflection. How very far we have traveled during the first half of the twentieth century! How strange and antiquated the horse-and-buggy days of 1900 appear in contrast to our chrome-plated motor age! Yet, as we revisit Rochester at the turn of the century, we discover that it was charged with dynamic energy, that it took its politics seriously and enjoyed a rich variety of colorful and satisfying pastimes. The women, still restricted in economic and political spheres, held sway in social and charitable fields and were establishing new footholds in education. A healthy spirit of growth was in the air, nurturing a receptive attitude towards new ideas, new instruments and agencies, and fresh points of view. Perhaps a backward glance at the Rochester of fifty years ago will sharpen our sense of direction as we approach the mid-century mark.

The year 1900 was of course recognized as epochal. A heated debate occurred between those who thought it to be the end of the old century and those who saw it as the beginning of the new. The *Fin de Siecle* advocates triumphed—at least they enjoyed the last word, saluting the new era in boisterous New Century ceremonies on January 1, 1901. Yet almost everybody recognized the centenary year as a turning point. Looking backward or forward as temperament dictated, they took stock, even as we are doing, of the trends of time.

As frequently occurs, the most clear-sighted prophet of the day was a humorist. His article on "The Horseless Age," printed in the *Democrat & Chronicle* on March 26, 1900, envisaged a distant future

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"when the horse will be crowded from the streets of Rochester, and readers will take note of such items as the following: 'Charles T. Chapin has been re-elected president of the Gentlemen Automobilists Speeding Association.' 'The county good roads commission has just awarded the contract for the asphalt pavement of Dugway boulevard.' 'The Hayes auto-extension ladder truck was slightly damaged yesterday by colliding with a garbage collection bureau autocart while responding to an alarm of fire from the Motor Cyclists.' "

### The Horseless Carriage

It was a fanciful prediction designed to provoke a chuckle. The advocates of good roads would have been content with a few loads of gravel for muddy stretches of the principal highways; no one dreamed of applying asphalt beyond the city limits! The city could not make up its mind about garbage collection, though many insisted that it was a public responsibility and that horse carts should be engaged throughout the year. Regularity rather than speed was the object there, and, as far as speed was concerned, that already attained by the numerous cyclists who dashed about the streets in droves was terrifying enough to drivers of carriages as well as pedestrians. Charles T. Chapin, the popular sportsman who had long served as president of the Gentlemen Drivers Association was not interested in the horseless carriage!

Yet the dawn of a new era was evident to watchful observers. Rochester's first automobile salesman, J. J. Mandery, had announced the arrival of his first models that January, and two competitors quickly opened salesrooms. If lassitude and disinterest greeted them at first, it was not solely because of the novelty of their product. Rochester inventors had been laboring to perfect a horseless carriage for more than two decades. George B. Selden's pioneer work in this field had justified application for a patent in 1879 though, by numerous improvements, he had deferred its date of issue until 1895. The growing interest in internal-combustion engines had enabled Selden to dispose of his patent rights on a royalty basis late in 1899 to the Columbia Motor Company of New Jersey, thus removing direct interest in its development from the city. Meanwhile, another Rochester inventor, Jonathan B. West, had devised and built a steam road engine in 1898, driving it as much as 300 miles or more through the

city streets. But the strange machine had not attracted favor. Indeed, when a horse, frightened by the noisy contraption, bolted and wrecked a carriage, its owner secured an award of \$53.40 in damages against West, although the latter ultimately won a reversal in a higher court.

The automobile was still in its experimental stage, but the year 1899, which saw the first long distance auto trips in America, brought two such visitors to Rochester. Thus Alexander Winton, a Cleveland inventor journeying eastward on a widely heralded drive to New York City, paused for lunch at the Powers Hotel on May 24. A crowd of curious onlookers quickly gathered about the machine, eager to watch it start; one gentleman volunteered to lead the way out East Avenue to the city limits in his carriage so that no horse would take fright. According to a reporter who interviewed him, Mr. Winton had an easy prospect ahead, for all he had to do was to fill the water and hydro-carbon tanks at the end of the day's ride with ingredients available at any country store. Unfortunately, this idyllic picture was shattered the next day when news arrived that a broken axle was holding the car in Fairport until a new axle could be ordered and shipped from the Cleveland shop.

A second automobilist reached Rochester in July from New York on a trans-continental dash sponsored by the *New York Herald*. The venturesome motorist, J. D. Davis, was accompanied by his wife and hoped to make the trip in forty-five days, but delays were already obstructing their progress. The party had been stalled for several hours just outside of Phelps while the mechanic who accompanied them on a bicycle located the trouble in a loose nut and rode back to town for a replacement. The condition of the road between Fairport and Pittsford was, according to Mrs. Davis, "awful," with sand and dust nearly ten inches deep in places. After a refreshing rest in Rochester, the Davises, already seven days running time out of New York, headed westward towards Buffalo, accompanied to the city line by Freeman H. Bettys of Rochester "with his automobile," apparently one of the first owned locally.

Shortly after the "Locomobile" was placed on display at 353 East Avenue by J. J. Mandery on February 10, 1900, Frederick Sager announced his agency for the Regas Vehicle Company. The Regas

was an electric car which, according to Sager, "subjected riders to none of the escaping steam, jets of fire, smoke and odors" of competing machines. "Ours are carriages, not machines," he advertised. "Prospective purchasers are invited to call and take a RIDE." A third agency for both electric and gasoline machines was announced a day or two later by C. J. Conolly.

If Rochester was somewhat behind several other cities in its adoption of the new sport (for such it was at the time), the Flower City took the lead in one respect. Miss Rose Cogan, star of "The White Heather" scheduled to open at the Baker theater on February 19, was persuaded at the last moment to ride onto the stage in a Waverly car instead of on a horse. Rochester thus became the scene of the first stage appearance of the automobile—a circumstance which may have prompted the *Democrat's* facetious prophecy, noted above.

That the horseless carriage was here to stay became apparent before the year was far spent. Mandery's offer to "store" all Locomobiles during business hours proved especially advantageous to gentlemen living at the lake during summer months. The businessman could thus drive into town in the morning, leave his vehicle at the rear of the Cutler building, where it would be serviced by Mandery's mechanics and made ready for his drive home in the evening. In place of the customary charges for a livery stable, food for the horse, etc., the only outlays, Mandery announced, would be about \$20 a month to cover both fuel and interest on the investment of \$760 in a runabout. The two-seated Locomobile, none of which had yet reached Rochester, would cost \$1,210 and require slightly more fuel but promised pleasure for a large family.

Mrs. Conolly, wife of the local agent for the Waverly, soon had her own car, an electric. Early in April of 1900 she drove a few friends of the College Women's club to South Park for an outing. J. Foster Warner, the architect, campaigned in his Locomobile for the renomination of Congressman O'Grady that fall, but the new gasoline engine proved no match for the political machine of George Aldridge, whose candidate easily triumphed.

The first speeders quickly appeared, "biling" (derived from cycling) along Main Street at the alarming speeds of twelve and

fifteen miles an hour. Some of the more responsible autoists—Dr. Keegan, Dr. J. L. Weller, J. Foster Warner, George Eastman, among others—seeing the need for more cautious driving, organized a local automobile club to stimulate the development of standards of etiquette and service. The club was formed in May, 1900, and before the end of the month it had joined hands with the Gentlemen Drivers Association to stage a race at Driving Park. Twelve automobiles of all types appeared in the preliminary line-up and paraded around the track, as horsemen traditionally performed. Only four actually entered the race which was won by a Stearns steamer in 1:27½ time, shattering even the 2:11¼ record made there by "Maud S" in 1881. Club "runs" to Ontario beach and other points of interest were scheduled that summer, much after the fashion of the bicycle clubs.

The Common Council could not make up its mind how to amend its traffic ordinance in order to recognize the automobile's existence. After many debates the theory that a machine should be compelled to go slower than a horse for safety purposes was reluctantly discarded. Finally on January 2, 1901, an ordinance was adopted, permitting speeds up to eight miles an hour on the city's outskirts but limiting the rate to six in the central district—anywhere within a mile's radius of the Four Corners, still the principal hub of Rochester.

Out-of-town speeding was greatly restricted by the state of the roads, which were anything but speedways. The good roads movement had won its first success only a few months before, partly through the efforts of the bicyclists. The Higbie-Armstrong bill, passed in 1898, had provided state funds to match those voted by towns and counties for the improvement of important highways. Little Ridge road and East Avenue beyond the city limits were the first in Monroe County to receive attention in 1899, but only a few miles had been macadamized by the turn of the century. The use of asphalt or "dude pavement" had made some headway on the streets of Rochester since its local introduction in 1886, but the price had been raised by a recently organized asphalt trust, and even the wealthy residential streets were hesitating to extend its use. No one dreamed of applying asphalt to the country roads.

Indeed the majority of Rochester's citizens were more directly inconvenienced by the deficiencies in the trolley service than by the condition of the streets and highways. Several outlying districts complained of neglect—notably Monroe Avenue south of the canal and the Dewey Avenue section—and almost everybody protested against the delays resulting from the practice of routing all cars to the Four Corners. Many of the company's 200 cars were in a poor state of repair, but, as the normal traffic demand could be met reasonably well by 100 cars, the officials neglected replacements. A power shortage occasionally interrupted service, and the great snow storm of March, 1900, not only stopped all cars for several days but opened a serious breach between the city and the railway officials. When the latter plowed the snow off the tracks into the streets, the city, forced to hire a crew of shovelers to move the great piles of snow over to the curb, sued the company for the expense. Little effort was made to clear the streets themselves, as all necessary traffic switched from wheels to sleighs—the Locomobiles, steamers, and electrics had of course been stored for the winter.

The most promising transport developments were occurring in the new field of suburban trolleys. The Rochester and Sodus Bay Railway Company secured its franchise early in 1899 and absorbed the old Glen Haven Railway that September, thus acquiring a right-of-way into the city as well as some useful rolling stock. Construction crews pressed the work eastward to Ontario village by the next July, and to Sodus by August. Meanwhile the Charlotte, the Windsor Beach, and the Manitou lines had operated prosperously all summer, and the old steam line to Sea Breeze, reorganized after a disastrous wreck in May, 1899, emerged as the Rochester & Suburban, equipped with fine, large, electric cars. Plans were under discussion for other suburban lines, one to Pittsford and Canandaigua, one westward to Lewiston; but these projects would not materialize for several years.

Moreover progress on the steam roads was again making Rochester a railroad center. The Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburg inaugurated an improved passenger and freight service in 1899. The Lehigh Valley projected a new station at Court Street the next year (though it was not completed for another five years) increasing the number of Rochester's passenger stations to eleven. The New York Central

decided to shift the headquarters of its western division from Buffalo to Rochester. The seven operating railroads were all in a thriving condition, and their total freight load in and out of Rochester now greatly exceeded that of the canal, although that old artery was enjoying an unexpected revival. The local boom in Erie canal trade was however a result of other transport developments, for its large coal shipments came to Rochester over the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburg and its heavy stone shipments were occasioned by the demands of the good roads movement. Rochester's lake trade was likewise booming, largely because of the improved facilities of the coal roads, but whatever the cause, a buoyant spirit permeated the harbor, infusing new life even into the old Charlotte Blast Furnace.

A prosperous and expansive industrial activity characterized Rochester at the turn of the century. The Chamber of Commerce, still interested in a bigger as well as a better city, was eager to attract new industries and new enterprise. Despite the rising criticism of monopolies, an enthusiastic press congratulated the local organizers of the perfume trust, the buttonhole trust, the voting machine trust, and the several efforts to consolidate competitors in the photographic industry. These and other technical and precision industries were growing so rapidly that the brusque and practical George Eastman could announce a gift of \$200,000 to Mechanics Institute without prompting anyone to suppose that he had become a "soft touch." Eastman's spacious mansion on East Avenue would not be erected until 1905, and Rochester had no hint of the philanthropic and cultural interests he would later acquire. Business concerns so completely absorbed his time that he gave little thought to community affairs—an attitude which characterized most businessmen of the day. Leaders of the clothing industry, by far the largest in the city, could deny the presence of any sweat shops, despite the findings of a state investigation, chiefly because of an unconscious blindness to conditions beyond their account books.

Trade unionism had made little headway in any of these industries, though its hold was firm in the shoe factories, the metal and brewing industries, and the building trades. Strikes were rare around the turn of the century when general prosperity and full employment brought automatic rewards to labor as well as management. Mass demon-



strations by Rochester unionists marked each Labor Day, and lectures on Socialism, the single tax and other schemes for social justice were frequently delivered before the Labor Lyceum, but the discussions which followed seldom displayed the emotional intensity of a few years before. Indeed the Labor Lyceum, which convened weekly during the winter season in the Common Council room, heard most of the leading candidates of the Republican and Democratic as well as the Socialist parties, and a good number of Rochester's progressive clergymen. Perhaps the fact that Rochester had never before known such prosperous years as 1899 and 1900 took some of the sting out of radical speeches.

### The Civic and Political Scene

There was plenty of sting in the political and journalistic exchanges of the day. Indeed, the issues involved—the debate over imperialism and the free coinage of silver, the struggle for an independent school board and a responsible municipal executive, the recurrent efforts to suppress gambling and disorderly houses and to check the new wave of criminal violence—stirred bitter factional battles and disclosed dilemmas destined to plague urban politics for many decades. The stratagems adopted by the opposing leaders produced a series of events culminating in a dramatic denouement late in December, 1900, completely overshadowing Rochester's New Century ceremonies.

These political episodes (which merit the attention of an able historical novelist) sprang from causes dating far back in the city's history. The struggle for an independent school board and other municipal reforms had dragged on for a score of years before the formation of the Good Government Club in the early nineties posed a serious challenge to the control of George Aldridge over the Republican party and the city as well. The club, comprised of 65 prominent civic-minded men, principally Republicans, had successfully backed the Democratic reformer, George E. Warner, for mayor in 1895 and 1897, but machine control over the Common Council had largely frustrated their efforts until 1899, when George Aldridge decided to grant the "Goo Goos" an independent school board in order to win them back to the fold. Both the Dow law, creating a



small independent school board, and the White Charter, reorganizing the municipal government around a strong and responsible mayor, were pressed through the legislature in sufficient time to permit Aldridge to regain the support of the Good Government forces for the election that November.

A candidate acceptable to both factions was found, after much difficulty, in George A. Carnahan. A respected judge, though by no means the first choice of either Aldridge or the reformers, Carnahan easily defeated Warner (as foretold by Rochester's second straw ballot conducted by the *Herald*) and proceeded to appoint assistants of unprecedented quality. James G. Cutler as Safety Commissioner and Joseph A. Crane as Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, gave promise of efficient administration in these newly centralized posts.

The police department had been greatly enlarged the previous year in response to a spreading crime wave, and early in 1900 Commissioner Cutler reorganized the force into five precincts in order to assure prompt action in case of an emergency in any part of the city. Unfortunately the problem was not so much one of speed as of clear and persistent purpose and intelligent cooperation up and down the line. The old practice of raiding a half-dozen disorderly houses once or twice a year and occasionally closing a gambling joint seemed a custom worthy of continuation for the community's self respect. But Mayor Carnahan, who took an active interest in these matters, was provoked when Cutler failed to keep him posted on impending raids. After several minor tiffs, Cutler resigned to be replaced by James D. Casey, a friend of Congressman O'Grady, who had meanwhile strayed from the Aldridge ranks.

Carnahan and Casey staged a new gambling raid, exposed an endless-chain lottery scheme, and arrested and fined Rochester's first slot machine operator. Earnest efforts were made to close all saloons on the Sabbath, to round up the Hard Cider gang, the Goat Hill gang, and other disorderly and criminal groups which had long terrorized various sections of the city. Credit for these efforts was forgotten, however, when the police bungled a shocking murder case, failing to collect evidence, such as measurements of the criminal's clearly marked footprints, and ended with no means of

identifying possible suspects. It was at this embarrassing moment that somebody tipped off the *Herald* about a "protected" gambling house, but more than the reputation of the police department was involved in the denouement.

The *Herald*, as an independent Democratic paper, had been disgruntled ever since the Good Government Club had deserted Warner and the Democrats. Eager to break up the club's new alliance with Aldridge, this astute opposition paper gave full coverage to a controversy which quickly developed over the school board. One of the first objectives of the new board was to remove Superintendent Noyes, long considered inefficient, incapable, and responsive to political pressure. But shortly after the passage of the Dow law, and before the new board was elected, Superintendent Noyes had resigned, and the old board had appointed him to a new four-year term. It was then discovered that a clause authorizing such action and protecting the Superintendent's tenure had been included in the Dow law as finally embossed by the state printer. No such clause appeared in the bill as originally passed, or in the copy approved locally, and the resulting scandal shattered the harmony of the new administration.

In the midst of a suit to determine the Superintendent's term of office (which Noyes finally won), the Board of Education discovered discrepancies in the financial reports of the previous four years. Noyes hastily resigned before action to remove him could be instituted, but the Good Government Club had become so embittered by the tactics of the Aldridge machine that it switched its backing to the local Democratic candidates that fall. The *Herald*, inspired with renewed hope, played up the rift between Aldridge and O'Grady, endeavoring to align Carnahan with the latter. The mayor, however, stood by his party in the hectic election of November, 1900, despite the defection of his Good Government friends.

No doubt the clean sweep made by the Republicans in Rochester reflected national rather than local trends. Both the "blustering" Teddy and the "silver tongued" Bryan had visited Rochester during the campaign, attracting between 20,000 and 30,000 each, thus cancelling each other out. Bishop McQuaid broke his traditional silence in political contests with an open attack on Republican imperialism,

and the taciturn Aldridge likewise broke precedent by issuing a public answer to the Good Government Club's charges on the school controversy. But apparently these questions had little effect on the results, which arrived with exciting rapidity on election night, speeded by the recent introduction in leading cities of voting machines, most of them made at Rochester.

The contest of 1900 had been full of vituperation, leaving bitter feelings in its wake. The *Herald*, dismayed by the prospect that the chastened Goo Goos would rush back to the Republican fold, jumped at the opportunity to blast the administration as a protector of favored gamblers. The story broke five days before Christmas when the *Herald's* young cartoonist, John S. Clubb, released several sketches of men gathered around a faro table in the Manhattan Club located on the second floor of a building at the central Main and St. Paul street corner. The startled mayor, advised by his officers that the place was closed, denied the *Herald's* charges, but the now indignant editor swore out a warrant and accompanied the police on a raid which uncovered a rich array of gambling equipment said to have been installed eighteen years before and operated unmolested by Rochester's gambling king, George McLaughlin, and his henchmen. The mayor's face must have been red that Christmas day when the story of the raid appeared; indeed the sensational details continued to dominate the news during the last issues of the year and the century. But if the *Herald* really hoped to defeat the machine or put an end to gambling it was destined to disappointment; only the probably innocent Carnahan paid the penalty when Aldridge and the Good Government Club found a new candidate for the next election.

Although unrelated to this dramatic series of political episodes, many other civic developments were likewise tinged with politics. Thus the Health Board's efforts to secure suitable garbage collection were frustrated by the fierce contest over possession of the contract between Hogel and Holahan, each backed by a separate political faction. Appeals from property owners in the Liberty Pole district for the establishment of a public market to replace the congested farmer's market which had long obstructed that busy street intersection could not be granted because of the jealous rivalry of Front and Scio streets. The campaign for a new high school was blocked

by the same east side-west side jealousy as well as by political rivalry over the contract.

But these restraints could not entirely check a number of imaginative leaders who broke through for new gains at several points. Dr. Goler, as health officer, frustrated in his early efforts to apply rigid standards of inspection to all milk brought into the city, established milk stations at which poor children and mothers with babies could get clean and fresh milk during the summer months. This venture of 1899 was expanded the next year, winning nationwide acclaim and helping to reduce the city's death rate to the lowest point yet achieved. Rochester's first use of a baby incubator in 1899 did not prove so fortunate, as the child died, but the effort indicated an alert attention on the part of local hospital staffs to the latest medical advances in Europe where the incubator was invented. The campaign by Dr. Goler for a tuberculosis sanitarium, although a decade ahead of its time, was likewise symbolical. The parks were beginning to show the results of the first decade's growth, particularly at Highland Park where the lilacs were already becoming a spring attraction. The park's second series of band concerts, held every Thursday evening during the summer of 1900, foretold another important development of later years.

An active supporter of several of these reforms, the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union made other valuable contributions. It was partly through its effort that the city's first vacation school was organized in 1899 and conducted so successfully that the program was enlarged the next year and soon taken over by the school authorities. In like fashion the Union joined with the Misses Lattimore and Milliman, heads of Columbia school, in sponsoring and conducting the city's first neighborhood playground in 1900. Despite opposition from some residents in the vicinity of No. 18 school, where the playground was located, the venture proved gratifying and inspired a movement for a city-wide program in this field.

### The Social Scene

Perhaps the absorption of the great majority of Rochester's male citizens in business and politics (and, in some cases, sports) speeded the advance of their wives and sisters in the social and public welfare fields. Ministers, educators, sometimes doctors or other professional

men, could be persuaded to head the boards of various charities, but much of the work and many of the ideas came from the ladies. The most vigorous champions of reform and improvement were members of the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union, active since 1893, but the formation of the Local Council of Women in January, 1899, comprised of representatives from all women's societies, provided an effective sponsor for community action.

The city's list of charitable organizations, largely sustained by the women, included six hospitals, four orphan asylums, four homes for the aged, three industrial schools, a children's aid society, a humane society, a Door of Hope, a rescue mission, and several auxiliary societies. Two Rochester girls decided in October, 1899, that Rochester also needed a settlement house comparable to Hull House in Chicago, and although their venture on Frank Street did not last long, a similar effort was to prove successful on Baden Street two years later. Another new venture by the ladies was the Consumers League organized locally in 1900 to campaign for fair working conditions in the food, clothing, and other industries in which they were interested as consumers. The Council, which sponsored the League's establishment, likewise directed the organization of mothers' clubs for each school and campaigned successfully for the naming of a woman to the new school board.

Although local suffragists, banded together in the Political Equality Club, could not claim any other political victories at the turn of the century, their growth in stature and influence was impressive. Susan B. Anthony had at long last won recognition, even in her home town, as a leader and a personality of the first rank. Mrs. Helen B. Montgomery, the first woman on the school board, Mrs. Mary T. Gannett and several other ladies could have matched talents with almost any man in the city. Many of their younger sisters were now attending college, and the College Women's Club of Rochester was maintaining a program of lectures and discussions that were both intellectual and humanitarian in scope. The women of Rochester, lead by Susan B. Anthony, achieved their greatest triumph in September 1900, when, after a long and often faltering campaign, a fund of \$50,000 was finally raised for the University of Rochester which then opened its doors to their daughters.

The University was not yet ready to recognize the admission of women as its most significant development at the turn of the century. Indeed Dr. Rush Rhees, the new president, caused some resentment when, at his inaugural in October, 1900, he failed to make any mention of the new character of the student body. The semi-centennial celebration held a few months before had of course given attention to the recently constructed gymnasium, the largest and best equipped in Rochester, and to the extension program reorganized early that year as a regular department of the university prepared to conduct Saturday credit classes for school teachers and a week-day vacation school that summer. It would take time to prove the merits of the new "co-eds."

The Rochester Theological Seminary, housed in comfortable quarters at the corner of East and Alexander streets, was only mildly disturbed by the doctrinal controversy which burst forth in these years between President Harper of Chicago and Professor Osgood of Rochester. Much more interest was shown in the developments in another part of town where George Eastman's \$200,000 gift enabled Mechanics Institute to erect a new home on Plymouth Avenue and to expand its program along the lines of the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia. Wagner College for German Lutherans was likewise more generously provided for in these years, while the completion of the new Hall of Philosophy provided more adequate facilities for St. Bernard's Seminary.

The city's 20 percent growth in population during the nineties, reaching 162,455 by 1900, justified the establishment of new church societies and the construction of several fine new edifices, among others St. Paul's Episcopal on East Avenue, Westminster on West Avenue, and First Methodist on Fitzhugh Street. Several of the churches were likewise adjusting their programs to the city's new urban needs, as the activities of Brick Church Institute, Gannett House, and St. Andrews Brotherhood indicated. Many church leaders took part in the theological controversies over the Westminster Confession, the attitude of the church towards amusements, towards war and imperialism, even socialism; but few really startling disagreements occurred until the Rev. Dr. Algernon Crapsey of St. Andrews and Dr. William T. Brown of Plymouth both declared, in

the midst of the heated controversy over gambling, that a true Christian could not join the Anti-Saloon League or support the popular campaign against gamblers!

Such a radical point of view (based on the contention that these approaches were not constructive in either a social or spiritual sense) challenged widely held convictions represented in Rochester by the Law Enforcement League, which sought an honest application of the Raines law, and the Prohibition Union headed by the fiery zealot, Clinton N. Howard. Young Howard could not devote all his time to the "Beer City of the East," as he characterized Rochester, for he was busy organizing Prohibition Unions throughout the land, but he never failed to rally a crowd on his return, or to stir his hearers with the warning that the cities of the world looked to Rochester, a city of churches, to take the lead in this crisis. And Rochester did respond, better than most of the cities he addressed, closing its saloons on Sunday, serving sandwiches with liquor, and checking the development of "music halls" as camouflage beer gardens. Even the ball teams had to rest on the Sabbath while in Rochester, a restraint not enforced in many other cities then in the professional leagues.

But if the counsel of Doctors Brown and Crapsey was officially rejected, their philosophy was gaining wide favor in practice. Thus the Y. M. C. A. shared their liberal acceptance of healthy amusement as an aid to clean and wholesome living. The Y was in fact opening many new channels of activity in these years. It not only organized the first basketball league in the city (having previously introduced that game itself) but likewise sponsored summer camps for boys and, more surprising, the first camera club. All of these developments of 1899 were continued and expanded in the centenary year and subsequently became important community activities. Even the Y. W. had its gym classes, its basketball team and its vacation home for girls on the lake shore by 1900.

The previous half-century had witnessed the introduction of so many games and other recreational activities that any attempt to devise new forms of excitement seemed futile. Yet that was just what several promoters endeavored to do. Manager King brought Tom Sharkey to Rochester for an exhibition match with his sparring



partner at Falls Field Athletic Club in 1899, J. J. Jeffries, the world's champion, appeared for a similar exhibition at Ontario Beach park the next summer. The owners of the latter resort tried various schemes to swell their crowds, including a pair of elephants, mother and baby, whose performances in the lake at Charlotte in August, 1899, provided much amusement. A carnival staged by the Elks on East Main Street for ten days in July, 1899, boasted many unusual features, but none of them proved so sensational or so enduring as the snake display set up and supervised by Peter Gruber, a local saloonkeeper, for the Rochester Press Club's annual show the next May. Rattlesnake Pete's museum, established on Mill Street a few years before, was thus given wide public notice, but it was Gruber's colorful and genial personality together with his weird assortment of pets and freaks that maintained his reputation during the next three decades spreading the fame of his museum throughout the land.

Perhaps the most ambitious effort to amuse and astonish Rochesterians in 1900 was the head-on crash of two steam engines staged at Driving Park on the Fourth of July. This widely advertised spectacle was sponsored by the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company with the hope of securing some exciting action pictures in order to spur the demand for biograph films. Unfortunately, almost everything went wrong and in a hopelessly undramatic fashion. Discouraged by a slim crowd, the management delayed its principal event in the hope that more would arrive. When at last the "race to destruction" was started, the light had become too poor for good photographic results. Moreover the track was too short to permit the charging engines to acquire much speed, and while they successfully demolished each other, onlookers, hopeful of seeing a flashing explosion, were disappointed.

The fact that only 2000, rather than the expected 20,000, had paid "to see the engines clash" proved discouraging to those who hoped to make Rochester famous as a center of spectacular events. Yet the city was generally ready to respond to skilled showmen or displays of sportsmanship. Buffalo Bill still attracted crowds of 15,000 or 20,000 to see his open-air spectacles held annually at Driving Park. And in 1899 the Rochester ball club, under the able direction of Coach Buckenberger, had successfully aroused local fans from their

spring lethargy by July and kept them at fever heat throughout the remainder of that triumphant season at Culver field and again during the sportsmanly contests that ended with Rochester in second place the next year. Local yachtsmen were likewise in fine fettle. Not only did their boat, the "Genesee," lead the field in the tryouts at Chicago in July, 1899, thus becoming the American Challenger in the Canada Cup races, but it also won the cup in the Toronto event that August and again defeated the Canadians when they came to Rochester in a vain effort to capture the Fisher Cup a year later.

Yet the local enthusiasm for all kinds of sports did not depend upon championship performances. Almost every lad in town belonged to a neighborhood nine, a fact which encouraged the park authorities to expand the play facilities at all city parks. Boat clubs were active on the upper and lower reaches of the Genesee, and two yacht clubs vied for support from the scores of yachtmen who sailed the lake and the bay. The great majority of Rochester's cyclists no longer belonged to any of the several bicycle clubs, which still staged club runs or meets, but the reason was not a declining interest in the sport, for the safety bicycle had become a tool of individual rather than group amusement. Monroe County's system of sidepaths, maintained by the voluntary license fees paid by the cyclists, was hailed as superior to that of any city of its size, and yet, with some 40,000 wheels registered in the county, these improved trails were none too numerous.

The Gentlemen Drivers Association attracted smaller crowds than had previously attended its periodic "meetings" principally because of its increasingly exclusive character, but a second driving club opened rival exhibits at the old fair grounds in 1899. Fast horsemen, checked finally in their reckless use of East and Lake avenues as race tracks in snowy weather, cleared a stretch of ice in the old Erie canal bed in the winter of 1899 for a series of horse races on its sheltered course. Ice boats raced on Irondequoit Bay, skaters crowded the improvised rink in the aqueduct, but no winter sport attracted the crowds which returned again and again every summer to the lake shore resorts. Fashions in bathing suits were becoming more reasonable and women as well as men were seen more frequently in the water than ever before though the great majority still seemed to

prefer the commercial amusements or contented themselves with the fresh breezes on the boardwalk.

Fashions of course changed more rapidly for women than for men. The women were in fact shedding many cumbersome garments at the turn of the century—in church where their hats were beginning to come off, as well as at the beach where their long sleeves and stockings were now frequently discarded. Men however still wore coats and hats even in hot weather, and the few who ventured to appear in shirt sleeves in the summer of 1900 were indignantly excluded from respectable restaurants, theaters, and other public places.

Perhaps the rigid restraints suffered by gentlemen in mixed company stimulated the growth of their social and sports clubs. Numerous Pedro clubs were formed in 1900 to play that newly introduced card game, while several older clubs expanded their recreational facilities, installing bowling alleys, card and billiard tables, and smoking rooms. One of the most important of the new organizations was the Society of the Genesee formed in New York in 1899 by former residents of Rochester and its hinterland. The 150 guests who attended the first annual dinner that January were so enthusiastic that their number doubled for the second dinner a year later although the principal Guest of Honor, General Otis, could not attend.

General Otis was only the most distinguished of Rochester's military heroes of the day. Over one hundred of the city's recruits had spent a few months in southern military camps in 1898, suffering more grievous hardships than any which faced the 61 who actually reached Cuba just as hostilities ceased. Approximately a score of local naval reserves secured some experience at sea; a slightly larger number served in the Philippines, and four Rochester girls were accepted as trained nurses and assigned to army hospitals. Although no Rochester lives were lost in battle, at least three died in camp, where the health conditions were often frightful. The city displayed genuine relief when the main contingent returned from Cuba on April 18, 1899.

The activities of Major-General Elwell S. Otis as Military Governor of the Philippines sharpened local interest in the campaigns against Aguinaldo as well as in the debate over America's new imperialism. General Otis, who had spent his boyhood in Rochester,

graduating from the University of Rochester prior to his service in the Civil War, had returned in 1870 to marry a daughter of Judge Henry R. Selden. Although an active military career kept him away from Rochester most of the time, he always cherished the Otis farm house on the city's outskirts as his home, and when relieved of command in the Philippines in May, 1900, he readily accepted the invitation of his old Rochester friends to return for a reception on June 15. Never before had the city enjoyed such a day. Band concerts, a great parade, a triumphal arch, numerous sports events, and lavish fireworks displays attracted a throng estimated at 100,000 into downtown Rochester for the event. Even the unveiling of the Douglass Monument on June 9, 1899, when an estimated 35,000 had gathered to watch the parade and hear Governor Roosevelt as the principal speaker, was completely overshadowed by Otis day.

### New Cultural Trends

Perhaps in no field except that of communications was the evidence of radical change so striking at the turn of the century as in the cultural sphere. The closing of the old art gallery after the death of Daniel Powers in 1897, followed two years later by the sale of his collections in New York, was symbolic of the end of an era. The annual exhibits of the Rochester Art Club at the Chamber of Commerce could not replace the lost gallery, though at least they gave some encouragement to the expression of local talent.

The Lyceum, the Opera House, Fitzhugh Hall, and other places of entertainment did not of course close their doors, but the character of their programs was undergoing a change. A respectable array of first rate stars visited Rochester in 1899 and 1900, including Herr Kraus as Tannhauser with Walter Damrosch directing the orchestra, James A. Herne as the lead in two of his own plays, Maude Adams in the "Little Minister," Richard Mansfield as "Cyrano," Jesse Bonstelle as "Camille," and James O'Neill in "The Musketeers." But the gaps between stars were larger than they had been during the Lyceum's early seasons a decade before.

Few if any observers realized that a serious challenger to the legitimate theater had already arrived. Indeed the modest notices given to the early showings of motion pictures make it difficult to

discover the original appearance of this new entertainment in Rochester. George Eastman had supplied Edison with his first sheets of film in 1889, the year in which the kinetoscope was patented. That famous toy was not released for public amusement until 1894 when the first kinetoscope parlor opened on Broadway on April 14, and on December 29 the Rochester public was invited to view the wonders displayed by four of these machines in the basement of the Sibley, Lindsay and Curr store.

The Sibley store, Rochester's leading department store, was then located in the Granite Building at the corner of Main and St. Paul streets, and the battery of kinetoscopes could not have had a more central location. There for five cents the curious citizen could see a performance by Carmentica the queen of dancers, Alcieda the trapeze performer, Annie Oakley the sharpshooter, or the Carnival Dancers. A new set of views was announced the next week, including the comic opera, "The Milk White Flag," and a thrilling fire scene. In order to assist incredulous readers in understanding the mechanical marvel, the store's second advertisement of its kinetoscopes suggested: "Imagine a camera with a power of making 150 exposures a second; then think of a machine which will bring the pictures thus taken rapidly to your vision, and you have in a rough way the idea of the Kinetoscope. The effect as you look into the Kinetoscope is the same as though you looked upon the original scene; every movement, every detail of the action is brought out perfectly." A later advertisement supplied additional information: "The photographs . . . are reproduced on an endless film, 52 feet long, which is made to revolve in the kinetoscope so that about 46 views will pass by the 'peep' in a second. The human eye is capable of receiving about forty impressions a second, and when these successive pictures are brought before one's vision so rapidly, the whole scene is practically reproduced—form, motion, everything but colors."

The projection of moving or "living" pictures on a screen or "canvas" was shortly achieved by rival inventors who promptly placed their machines on tour and Rochester saw them practically in the order of their original appearance. The Eidoloscope of the Lathams, advertised as "a remarkable improvement of Edison's Kinetoscope," came first, attracting crowds to the Wonderland for

two weeks in January, 1896. Its life-sized reproductions of a prize fight and a horse race stirred greater enthusiasm than the simultaneous showing of the picture play, "Miss Jerry," a slightly earlier effort to present a pictorial story with the aid of a magic lantern. The Lyceum brought the Kineomatograph, an early model of the Edison-Armat machine, to Rochester that summer to present short films of a dancer, a breaking wave, a group of bathing girls and another prize fight; and in November the Wonderland featured a continuous performance of moving pictures by Lumiere's Cinematograph. This first showing of a French film in Rochester attracted enthusiastic crowds. Twelve short reels were shown, each comprised of approximately 900 pictures on 90 feet of film which represented about one minute of running time. None of the American films of this year boasted such length and the management of the Wonderland was justly proud of its offering: "A seashore scene is especially wonderful; bathers are represented running, diving, swimming. . . . There are scenes showing a railroad train in motion, coming to a stop, discharging and taking on passengers." A Frenchman feeding tigers in the Paris zoo, two editors quarrelling over a news article, a French cavalry charge—there seemed to be no limit to the possibilities of the cinematograph. Perhaps nowhere in America were these developments watched with keener interest than among the executives of the Eastman Kodak Company whose letters at this time displayed a feverish excitement over the prospect of capturing the new market for film.

Few in Rochester or elsewhere suspected that these novel performances presented a serious challenge to the dramatic companies. They were occasionally fitted into a schedule of variety and gymnastic shows at the cheaper theaters. The somewhat antiquated Cook Opera House gave a Sunday performance in November, 1899, of the Biograph Company's film showing Pope Leo XIII walking in the Vatican Gardens, driving in the Vatican carriage and greeting his guests. A few months later the Lyceum devoted three nights to a three reel "biography" of the Sharkey-Jeffries fight. It would be several years before the opening of the Bijou Dream, in the summer of 1906, provided Rochester with its first regular motion picture house.

The experience of the musical stars seemed to confirm the optimistic belief that mechanical reproductions could not compete with living artists. Rochester had prided itself on its possession of one of the world's largest orchestrions in the Powers Gallery, but when the famed music box was put up for sale in September, 1900, its \$10,000 value had dropped to \$1,650, and the successful bid came from the owner of a store at the Seven Corners who wished to use it to attract crowds on Saturday evenings. No one thought of it, or of the private gramophones now widely distributed, as competitors of the stars brought to Rochester by the Tuesday Musicals or for the Press Club's spring music festivals. Perhaps the most notable musical event in Rochester at the turn of the century was the "hour of sheer delight" brought to a Lyceum audience by Madame Schumann-Heink on April 19.

The turn of the century found Rochester sadly deficient in library and lecture facilities. The Reynolds Library emphasized a reference function, and the Central School library housed in cramped quarters at the high school had curtailed its lending services to adults. Except for the Labor Lyceum, which attracted a special audience, the vigorous lecture programs of earlier years had practically disappeared, while those of the new century had not yet been launched. The men's clubs in various churches partially supplied the need, inviting Burton Holmes, Elbert Hubbard, Booker T. Washington and a few other national figures to Rochester in these years, but only the women's clubs and the Labor Lyceum, which heard Eugene V. Debs on November 2, 1900, took lectures seriously. The city's literary output, except for a thriving daily press, was likewise declining, although Thomas T. Swinburne published his book of poems, "By the Genesee," in December, 1900.

The Rochester press was however bubbling with energy. High standards of reporting were maintained in several departments by the *Herald*, the *Post Express* and the *Union & Advertiser*, but it was in the so-called "Old Granny," the *Democrat & Chronicle*, especially in its Sunday edition, that most of the new features were appearing. Its extensive coverage of women's affairs was at least rivaled by the *Herald*, and sports events were emphasized by all, but the *Democrat & Chronicle's* full page of humorous cartoons and rhymed jokes under



the caption "Fun," launched in 1897, was unique in Rochester. Still another prophetic feature was added in 1899, when an earlier children's page suddenly acquired Rochester's first comic series. The "Jolly Jobbernowls," as it was called, presenting each Sunday three verses by Caroline Wetherell and three illustrative cartoons by Alfred W. Schwartz, carried along a fanciful narrative for several months until superseded by "The Rubbernecks" into which the Jobbernowls were transformed. No doubt the standard comic strips, when finally introduced locally, sprang more directly from other sources, but some of the present day innovations by Al Capp might find a cultural antecedent in "The Jobbernowls," who, when "washed up from the merfolk's ocean caves, Rejoiced again to see the sun and planned new ways of having fun . . ." as the series blithely commenced on March 5.

When the *Herald's* young cartoonist, John S. Clubb, launched a political series in September, 1900, another twentieth century feature was ushered onto the Rochester scene. And perhaps it was more appropriate than anyone at the time could have guessed that the Red Cross should sponsor a series of song fests or Twentieth Century Watch Meetings in Rochester as elsewhere across the nation on January 1, 1901, for certainly the first half of this century has seen more urgent calls for its services than the relatively peaceful nineteenth seemed to foreshadow.

This half-century has likewise brought astonishing transformations in Rochester. The city's population has more than doubled and its area has been enlarged though not as greatly as the area of its metropolitan influence. Communication facilities and speeds have been multiplied until their very abundance and velocity threaten diminishing returns. The film industry has expanded far beyond the wildest dreams of its founders, with the Kodak city a principal beneficiary. Rochester has corrected most of its deficiencies of 1900, acquiring a fine public library and two model museums, and transforming its college into a university of high scientific distinction. Its art and particularly its musical facilities have become outstanding. And if the number who share these cultural advantages is still limited, a wide reaching community spirit has been developed in the welfare field under the leadership in part of the Council of Social Agencies.

If the high sense of community responsibility engendered here can be joined to the individual drive for self expression which still dominates the economic field, bright prospects loom ahead for Rochester, but the choices we must make as well as the fates we cannot influence promise to test our courage.

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** The facts in this essay were gathered from the local newspapers of the day, particularly the *Herald*, the *Democrat & Chronicle* and the *Post-Express*.

Readers interested in consulting the literature dealing with some of these developments on a national scale may find the following list useful:

Aaron Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism*

Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures*

John A. Fairlie, *Municipal Administration*

Harold U. Faulkner, *The Quest for Social Justice: 1894-1914*  
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Lloyd Morris, *Not So Long Ago*

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Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights*

Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Paths to the Present*

